

Institutional Responses to COVID-19

We are pleased to publish the second regular issue of *Higher Learning Research Communications (HLRC)* for 2021, which follows the publication of the first issue in June and the Special Issue, *Implications of COVID-19 on Higher Education*. The pandemic continues to impact higher education in many parts of the world. While in some areas, higher education institutions have reopened, others are continuing to operate at least partially remotely as they deal with the risk for COVID infections. In the United States, enrollments have declined. Enrollment in bachelor's degree programs have declined 6.5%; enrollment of first-time freshman declined by 12.3%; and international enrollments declined by 21.2% (Schwartz, 2021). In a report on global higher education based on the results of a survey to assess the impact of the pandemic on higher education, UNESCO (2021) wrote that institutions reported decreased research output, more shifting to hybrid learning, and limited impact on staff; institutions also reported that the extent of inequalities in higher education was magnified. It is clear that higher education institutions globally are continuing to be impacted by a pandemic that has been tenacious.

As the manuscripts in the current issue and those published in the previous issues this year indicate, the implications of the pandemic on higher education continue to be far-reaching. Higher education likely will shift to more of a hybrid learning model, as several of the authors suggest, to remain flexible in meeting the needs of students and faculty while being ready to quickly shift modalities when required. The shift to more online aspects of teaching and learning brings costs. As some of the authors in this issue note, cheating and assessment deployment are key considerations when learning how to best pivot to more online instruction.

Research Articles in Volume 11, Issue 2

- Cheryl Burleigh, Patricia B. Steele, and Grace Gwitira, in their empirical study *Online Adjunct Faculty Perceptions of Professional Development to Support Personal and Professional Academic Growth During COVID-19*, used qualitative narrative inquiry to understand what online adjunct faculty value as support services, specifically professional development opportunities. The study resulted in the identification of possible improvements and enhancements to existing PD content that would further support faculty personal development, mental health, well-being, and academic growth. There are numerous variables, including unforeseen crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that need to be considered when developing, implementing, and presenting PD for online adjunct faculty professional and personal growth. Because faculty want to be listened to and heard, the PD development and implementation process needs to be interactive to support online adjunct faculty, regardless of whether the university is for-profit or not-for-profit.
- Elizabeth Johnston, Cheryl Burleigh, Xeno Rasmusson, Patrick Turner, Drena Valentine, and Liston Bailey, in their empirical article *Multimedia Open Educational Resource Materials for Teaching-Online Diversity and Leadership: Aligning Bloom's Taxonomy and Studio Habits of Mind*, used these two frameworks to develop a method of vetting and incorporating open education resources into the curriculum. The study resulted in the identification of six exemplar learning opportunities that could be incorporated into the blended pedagogical model. Each exemplar OER included all four types of knowledge as defined by Bloom's taxonomy and required the skills of observe and envision as defined in the studio habits of mind. Educators need a new mindset to work with multimedia and visual resources.

The blended pedagogical model provides scaffold teaching and learning opportunities that were not visible in either Bloom's taxonomy or studio habits of mind alone. This blended pedagogical model scaffolds the "how" when using a visual approach to curriculum development that may enrich the learning experiences of students when presented in online higher education classrooms.

- Suman Laudari, Sojen Pradhan, and Sanjay Lama, in their qualitative study *Remote Teaching in Nepalese Higher Education During COVID-19: Teachers' Perspectives*, examined the factors that supported or inhibited teacher participation in remote teaching. Teaching and learning in Nepal were predominantly face-to-face prior to the pandemic, and the previous studies showed that the use of educational technology in higher education was limited. The authors found that personal factors such as teachers' sense of duty and their attitude towards technology use facilitated their practice despite technological (internet connection), organizational (directives on exams or online classes), and environmental (inconsistent power supply) issues. They noted that teachers, colleges, and universities should continue to practice uptake of technology to move education towards a blended approach to teaching and learning. Also, educational authorities should provide more explicit guidelines on teaching and learning and the administration of assessments across multiple situations, including pandemics and other emergencies, that require higher education to pivot from traditional face-to-face learning.
- Sayed Ahmad Javid Mussawy, Gretchen Rossman, and Sayed Abdul Qahar Haqiqat, in their mixed-methods study *Students' and Faculty Members' Perceptions and Experiences of Classroom Assessment: A Case Study of a Public University in Afghanistan*, examined students' perceptions of classroom assessment at a public university in Afghanistan after implementation of a policy change regarding assessment practices. Exploring current assessment practices focused on student and faculty members' lived experiences was a secondary goal. The study also sought to collect evidence on whether the new assessment policy was effective in student achievement. Students reported positive perceptions of the current assessment practices. However, both students and faculty members were dissatisfied with the grading policy, reinforcing summative over formative assessment. Results support that the policy change regarding assessment has resulted in more students passing the courses compared to in the past. The findings also suggest improvements in faculty professional skills such as assessment and teaching and ways that they engage students in assessment processes.
- Silvie MacLean, in her critical literature-based analysis *A Conceptual Continuous Improvement Framework to Examine the "Problems of Understanding" Applied Research*, sought to understand more clearly why faculty of colleges in a Canadian province are not engaged in applied research practices. Using social cognition theory through a social constructivist lens, she examined the evolution of colleges in the province, including the political factors and symbolic artifacts that shaped values and organizational practices. By improving communication, learning through collaboration, and changing through coordination, the conceptual continuous improvement processes provide opportunities to bridge the differing applied research contexts and unveil the varied on-the-ground realities of faculty teaching and research tasks. The analysis shows that institutional challenges related to applied research practice changes have been influenced by political, cultural, and socio-cognition contexts and tasks. The continuous improvement framework provides a viable means to analyze the fragmented state of applied research practices across Ontario colleges, which may ignite conversations and inform decision-making as well as suggest approaches to change at other global postsecondary education institutions.
- Amel M. Shoaib and Khawla A. Zahran, in their qualitative study *Systematic Collective e-Cheating in a Saudi Arabian Higher Education Context: A Case Study*, investigated organized group cheating in a Middle Eastern institution during the shift to e-learning brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. They found a novel type of misconduct, which they termed *systematic collective e-cheating*. As a result of their analysis, they provide insights on the causes and types of e-cheating in a Middle Eastern context.

They noted that academic misconduct was directly influenced by a rapid transition to e-learning, societal culture, and subjective norms, all of which jointly contributed to shifts in ethical perceptions leading to increased reports of cheating. The authors suggest that education professionals need to be aware of underlying issues related to unethical behaviour and encourage students to understand and address negative ideologies regarding ethics on a societal level.

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Special Issue for 2022: Education Technologies and COVID-19: Experiences and Lessons Learned

In recognition of the continued impact of the pandemic on higher education, the Higher Learning Research Communications journal will publish a special issue, *Education Technologies and COVID-19: Experiences and Lessons Learned*, in 2022. The description is provided below. We encourage authors to submit manuscripts for consideration by March 31, 2022. Please visit the Higher Learning Research Communications journal at <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/hlrc/> for more detailed information. We encourage papers from higher education institutions globally as well as those from new authors.

The Higher Learning Research Communications journal (HLRC) is launching a call for papers for a special issue to be published in 2022. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions were required to pivot from primarily online instruction to hybrid and/or completely online instruction. This required significant investments in technologies that would allow faculty and administrators to make the pivot. We are interested in understanding the experiences of that shift, specifically as it relates to how educational technologies were used. Through empirical research and essays, we would like to collect a series of papers that describes the global response to technology needs and how the shifts impacted teaching and learning. Some questions of interest include but are not limited to:

- *Technology considerations by universities as they pivoted to online instruction.*
- *How countries are using educational technology, including learning management systems, handheld devices, webcasting, and other means of bringing faculty and students together to achieve teaching and learning goals.*
- *Specific tools used in the pivot, experiences with those tools, and outcomes assessment demonstrating the effectiveness (or lack of effectiveness) of tools.*
- *How institutions dealt with Internet connectivity issues and how connectivity (or lack of) impacted instructional effectiveness.*
- *The impact on teaching and learning of inequalities in access to the internet (“the digital divide”).*
- *Strategies used by instructors to achieve learning communities in the online classrooms.*
- *How the pivot has driven changes to core teaching and learning models.*
- *Student and faculty responses to the transition post-pandemic and how attitudes toward various technologies will shape future teaching and learning.*
- *How institutions managed issues associated with giving assessments in online hybrid environments*

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